

SAN DIEGO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PROBATION

PREVENTION

In the context of Juvenile Crime, **Prevention collectively refers to all efforts to avert delinquent behavior.** Prevention efforts identify the factors contributing to delinquent behavior and then **develop “protective factors” to address and ameliorate those factors.** Prevention programs **focus on involving youth in activities that provide positive influences** in their lives and keep them from engaging in delinquent behavior. These programs work by:

- Developing positive life skills
- Offering support and direction to the families and youth
- Occupying the youth’s time with activities that keep them out of trouble

Patterns of juvenile delinquent behavior show the greatest time for delinquent activities are in the hours just after school ends. Studies have determined 60 of juveniles non-sleeping hours are consumed by school, homework, chores, meals or employment. The remaining 40 percent of their time is spent alone or with peers, but without adult supervision. Children in low-income families are more likely than others to be home alone for three or more hours each day. In addition to the lack of adult supervision, other factors effecting delinquency include:

- Abuse or neglect by family members or others
- Peer groups consisting of delinquent juveniles
- Ready access to drugs or guns
- Truancy
- Familial history of incarceration
- Unsafe and/or ineffective schools

Experts in the area of Juvenile crime agree that Prevention strategies are critical to help reduce these risk factors and provide youth with the opportunity to flourish and become productive members of society.

Children are influenced by the number of people in their lives. Many of these people become key participants in the Prevention efforts. The direct participants can be broken down into four basic groups; families, schools, communities and other juveniles. All of these groups have a potential for direct and meaningful contact with juveniles in their communities or in their homes, and may all have either a positive or negative influence on the child’s life. The power of prevention resides in the coordinated effort of these players to build a positive web of influence around at-risk youth.

Research has shown that prevention works and is far less costly than having a juvenile enter the criminal justice system.

- The national figures show the cost of incarcerating a juvenile is between \$34,000 and \$64,00 per year.
- The cost of young adult’s (i.e., 18 to 23 years of age) criminal career throughout adulthood has been estimated to be as much as \$1.1 million dollars.

In contrast, Prevention programs cost thousands less per year for each juvenile.

- A California delinquency Prevention program was able to produce a direct cost saving of \$1.40 for every dollar spent in law enforcement and the juvenile justice system.
- The Federal Job Corps Program, which helps at-risk youth, reports that every dollar invested has returned \$1.46 to society through decreased income maintenance payments, reduction in costs of incarceration and taxes paid by former Job Corps students.
- The Youth Education And Employment Program helps youth build confident, self-reliant lives through a flexible, comprehensive program and has placed 75% of its participants in unsubsidized employment.
- Straight Talk About Risks, a school program in Dade County, Florida, showed a 30% decrease in gun injuries and deaths among school-aged youth as a result of the program.
- Through education, mediation and law enforcement involvement, the Gang Unit School Safety Program in Ohio was able to reduce its school gang-related incidents by 39%.
- The Gang Prevention/Intervention Coalition in Washington, D.C. was able to decrease youth violence by 80%.
- Public housing projects with Boys and Girls Clubs have crime rates 13% lower than those without them. The prevalence of drug activity is 22% lower and crack cocaine presence is 25% lower in housing projects without clubs.
- The Michigan High/Scope Perry Preschool program, based on the Head Start model have found that over the participants' lifetimes, the public receives an estimated \$7.16 return for every dollar spent.
- As of June 1999, the San Diego, The Community Assessment Team (CAT) has serviced approximately 3,200 individuals, children and their families. To date, 99% of the juveniles serviced by CAT have not entered the juvenile justice system.

Effective and coordinated Prevention programs can produce substantial savings in treatment provided to juveniles on the path to delinquency. When youth can not be steered away from the path of juvenile delinquency through family and community involvement and participation in Prevention programs, they will become a part of the juvenile justice system.

However, the true value of an investment in Prevention programs is the impact on our youth and their families and communities. Investment in Prevention now will produce healthier, engaged and contributing youth in the future.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Serious, Violent, & Chronic Juvenile Offenders, A Sourcebook , James. Howell, et al, SAGE Publications, 1995.

Combating Violent Delinquency: the National Juvenile Justice Action Plan, US Department of Justice, Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, March 1996.

The Real War on Crime, Donziger, ed., HarperCollins, New York: 1996.

How Do We Know What Works In Juvenile Justice?, Susan Pannel, September 1999.

Arizona Juvenile Justice Evaluation Final Report, Deloitte Consulting, December 15, 1998.

San Diego County Community Assessment Teams

Community Assessment Teams (CATs) are the Prevention component of a three-year State Challenge Grant program called Breaking Cycles. Breaking Cycles is a multi-agency, geographically diverse project designed to prevent and reduce the number of delinquent youth in the juvenile justice system. The CAT Prevention component focuses on at-risk youth and their families; and the Graduated Sanctions component seeks to improve the juvenile justice and community response, through a system of graduated sanctions, to juvenile offenders.

CATs began as a multi-disciplinary assessment process at two pilot sites in July 1997. In December 1997, California Senate Bill 1050 provided an additional \$2 million to expand the project to serve the entire county and provide direct services for the youth and families based upon their assessed needs. The CATs have been up and running since May 1998.

TARGET POPULATION:

CATs serve youth at risk of entering the justice system and their families. The average age of the referred youth is 13.4 years. Males constitute slightly more than half the juveniles in the target group, although CATs serve a higher percentage of females than at any other point in the justice system. Countywide, Latinos comprise the highest proportion of clients (49%), followed by Whites (29%). The most common reason a client is referred to CATs is for school problems (39%). Family issues are the next most frequent problem facing the referred youth (28%).

SERVICES PROVIDED:

Referred families are contacted by the CATs to determine their need for services. Families desiring services participate in the multidisciplinary assessment process to determine service needs and develop a case plan. Of the total number of eligible families, 57% require case management services while the remainder do not require services beyond a link to programs in the community.

Families' needs are addressed by the CATs through services within the CAT team as well as through programs within the community. CATs provide the case management services, including Intake, Assessment, Records Check, Service Plan, Follow-Up, and Tracking. CATs are mobile--the majority of families receive both intake and assessment services in their homes (63% and 74%, respectively). Variations in service delivery do exist across the sites, mainly due to the needs of the clients at each site.

Almost three-quarters of the families countywide are referred to outside agencies for services (71%). Multiple referrals can be provided to the same clients. Services received include:

- Counseling 39%
- Parent Training 24%
- Mentoring (16%)
- After School Program (15%)
- Tutoring/School (15%)
- Family Conferencing (12%)
- Drug Treatment (9%)
- Juvenile Diversion (5%)
- Anger Management (4%)
- Crisis Intervention (3%)
- Mediation (3%)
- Psychiatric (3%)
- Unknown (1%)

San Diego County Community Assessment Teams

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

The Criminal Justice Research Division of San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) is compiling data on the youth being served and the interventions being received by the families. Although only 13 months of data have been collected and analyzed, the CAT's are showcased below as a highly effective program.

The five CAT sites are serving more clients than expected. Almost 3,200 clients were referred to a CAT through June 30, 1999. A client is defined as *an at-risk youth in the community and his entire family*. The estimated average family size is 3.3 (1.3 siblings living with a single parent and the target youth). Based on this estimate, over 10,000 individuals were touched by the CATs in 13 months.

CAT sites are responsive to the needs of the surrounding community. CAT clients reflect the population in the surrounding community with respect to ethnicity and at-risk behavior. Over half of the youth served are under age 14, with nearly a quarter ages 10-12. The majority are male (59%) and about half are Latino (49%). Thirty percent have Spanish as their primary language.

CAT clients are successful. The majority successfully complete their family case plan, and are either in school or employed upon completion. 99% of youth served have not entered the juvenile justice system. Long-term success (one year after program exit) for clients served in Year One will be assessed in Calendar Year 2000.

CAT sites are assisting schools and law enforcement. Most youth are referred to the CATs by schools and law enforcement. CATs provide an additional resource to them, thereby reducing resources previously utilized by the school staff and police officers for follow-up.

The community is aware of CAT services. The CAT program was designed to increase client knowledge and willingness to access services in the community. Client surveys administered upon program entry indicate an awareness of services available, though they had not accessed these resources. Future analysis of exit surveys will examine the change in service utilization. The majority of respondents to a service provider survey were aware of the CAT program. Over half of these providers refer families to the CATs. Over one quarter of the respondents receive referrals from the CATs.

CATs provide services through collaboration. The success of the CATs depends upon collaboration. Collaborative groups in each community, with representatives from schools, probation, business, law enforcement and other service providers, support the efforts of the CATs. This oversight contributes to more cost-effective, efficient, and available services in each community.